

Fightback

June 2013

Struggle, Solidarity, Socialism

**Marxism and
mental health**

Special Feature:

**Workers
take on
McDonald's**

**Unit
the union**

**The case for
eco-Marxist
politics**

**Racism
& recession**

**A health and safety
system unfit for
purpose**

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Fightback magazine is now in its 20th year as we continue the long-term fight for socialism. Readers and supporters may consider remembering us in their will with assets or money that will help the struggle in the long-term. If this is you please put in your will 'Fightback, PO Box 10-282, Dominion Road, Auckland' as well as what you would like to leave to us.

E d i t o r i a l

Welcome to the June 2013 issue of Fightback, publication of Fightback (Aotearoa/NZ). Fightback is a socialist organisation with branches in Auckland, Hamilton, Wellington and Christchurch.

On Queens' Birthday Weekend, 31st May-2nd June, Fightback held its annual public conference in Wellington. In this issue we include the text of two presentations given during the conference, Grant Brookes' "Workers, Unions and Class Struggle Today" (page 10) and Daphne Lawless' "Green is Red: The case for eco-Marxist politics (page 20).

An ounce of action is worth a ton of theory, and Fightback actively supports workers in struggle. From pages 10-15 we cover the struggles of unionised McDonald's workers for improved pay and conditions in Aotearoa/NZ. This includes an overview of the campaign, a response to homophobic bullying by management, reports on a Wellington strike and a report on

a Fightback action supporting the campaign. The struggle against capital is international. Therefore we also reprint a report from a union campaign against McDonald's in Detroit, USA.

In May we highlighted the role of mainstream political racism in fostering working-class racism. In an article originally printed in an Australian paper The Socialist, Jared Phillips reports on the appointment of Susan Devoy as Race Relations Commissioner for Aotearoa/NZ, and argues the need for solidarity in overcoming racism.

Fightback member Kelly Pope suggests mental health advocacy and radical politics can be mutually complimentary.

Finally, we cover local government issues in Auckland (page 23) and the need for workers' action to overcome the failings of the Health & Safety system (page 24).

In Brief

McDonald's Tax Cheats

McDonald's have been accused of avoiding paying tax in New Zealand. Mike Treen, National Director of Organising at UNITE Union has accused McDonald's of using internal loans and excessive trademark and franchise fees to lower the total amount they were liable for tax.

Treen identifies international reporting of McDonald's operations which indicates that this is a global issue, with McDonald's UK operations claiming to have not made a profit in ten years. High interest loans and large franchise fees out of country were again used to dodge paying any tax.

Treen states that "If it is legal it should be outlawed. If its not legal they should be prosecuted."

PPTA suing Education Ministry

The Post Primary Teachers Association have filed a class action against the Acting Secretary for Education Peter Hughes.

The class action suit is in response to the ongoing fallout of the Novopay crisis. The issues remain from the under/overpayment that resulted from the online pay system failing to properly process teachers' pay.

Although the fortnightly pay is now relatively stable and reliable, the backlog of missed pay is still yet to be resolved, the reason behind this recent court action. Instead of working with the union to resolve outstanding issues, a spokesperson for the Ministry of Education has said that they will be "defending it vigorously"

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Struggle, Solidarity, Socialism

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Industrial struggle

Workers, Unions and Class Struggle Today

Abridged from a talk given to the Fightback 2013 Conference. By Grant Brookes, Wellington Fightback member and union delegate.

This article offers the perspective of a Fightback member, however perspectives within Fightback differ. Further perspectives on workers' and union struggles will be covered in the coming months.

Sessions at socialist conferences on “workers, unions and class struggle” usually go along much the same lines. They analyse a fairly narrow set of statistics on strikes, lockouts, wage movements, and then draw conclusions about “the state of the class struggle”.

So, for argument's sake, what might this data suggest today?

Here are the figures for work stoppages

(that's strikes and lockouts) for the last 25 years.

A couple of things clearly stand out. The trend is downwards. And strike activity in New Zealand today is practically zero.

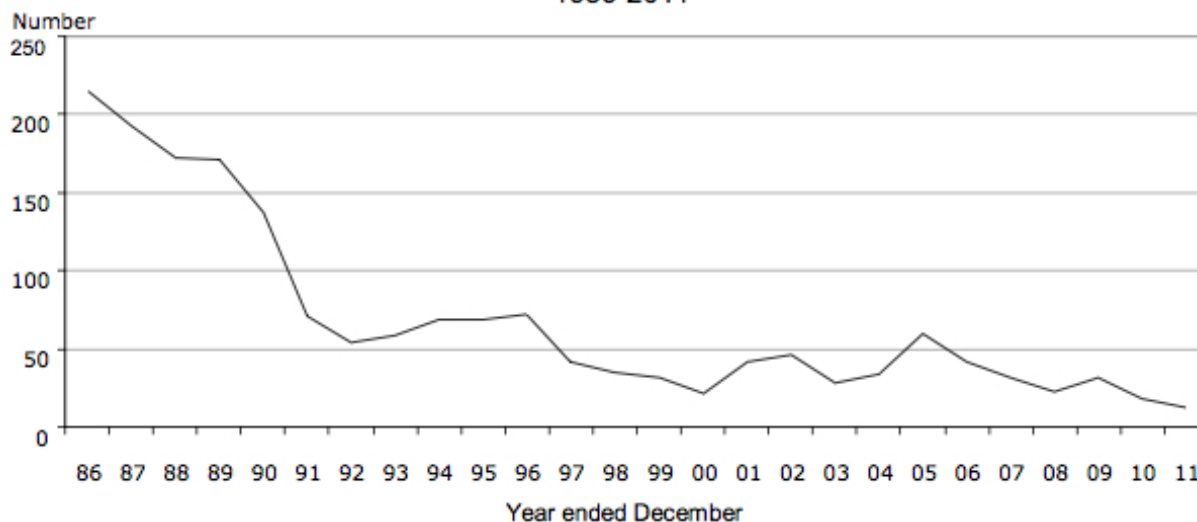
These facts recently led one of our comrades in the International Socialist Organisation to pose the question, “Has the working class lost all fighting capacity?” (<http://iso.org.nz/2012/10/13/the->

Table 1: Annual work stoppages

Calendar year	Number of stoppages	Number of employees involved	Person-days of work lost	Estimated loss in wages and salaries \$(million)
2004	34	6,127	6,162	1.0
2005	60	17,752	30,028	4.8
2006	42	10,079	27,983	5.2
2007	31	4,090	11,439	1.9
2008	23	C	C	C
2009	31	8,951	14,088	2.4
2010	18R	C	C	C
2011	12	2,098	4,850	1.0
Symbols				
C confidential				
R revised				

Number of work stoppages

1986-2011



Industrial struggle

class-struggle-today/).

It's a serious question. After all, the last year that the number of stoppages was this low, half the strikes involved stokers refusing to tend steam engines. That's how far back in history you have to go to find comparable numbers.

Even at that time, New Zealand was an international curiosity. The Times newspaper of London was referring to this country as "the land without strikes".

And Lenin was mockingly describing us as "the paradise of the second international", the one place where labour and capital supposedly lived in harmony in accordance with social democratic theories.

So have we really entered an age where the struggle between classes in New Zealand is basically over? Is the working class finally out for the count?

If this was true, it would be a serious challenge to Marxist theory and to the

reason for being of an organisation like Fightback.

According Marx, class struggle is the key driver of historical change. As he and Engels wrote on page one of the *Communist Manifesto*, "The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles".

Class struggle underpins political shifts, shaping opinion polls, changes of government and social attitudes. And it provides the historical force for the transition to a post-capitalist society.

Capitalism today creates a nexus of many interconnected forms of oppression and exploitation. These include the subjugation of women, proscriptions against expressions of sexuality which depart from monogamous, heterosexual norms, devaluing of differently abled citizens, extraction of wealth from the work of the majority who are compelled to labour, and so on.

In a colonial context, as in Aotearoa,

capitalism involves the alienation and domination of the tangata whenua.

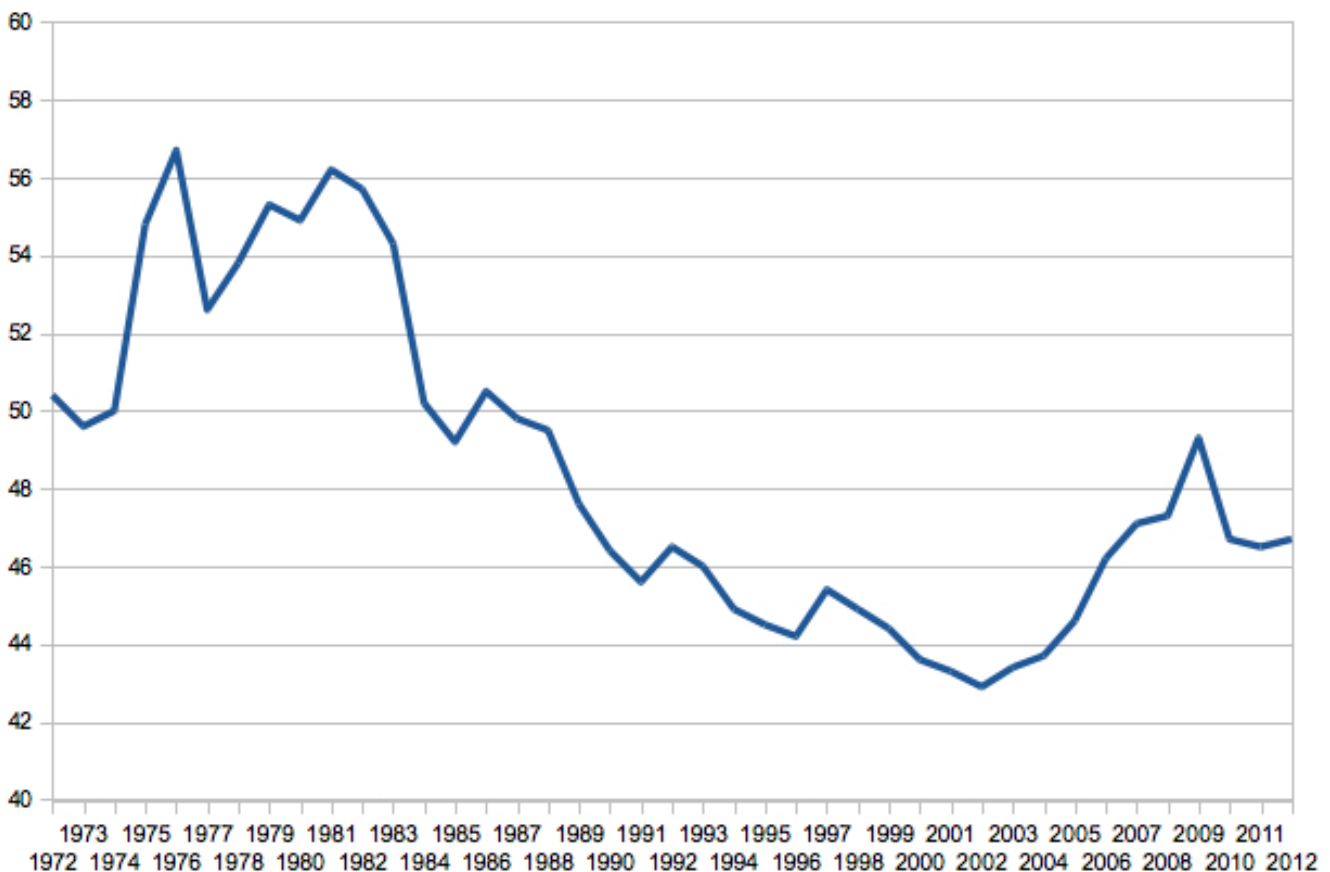
Struggles against each and every form of oppression and exploitation are essential for our emancipation. But one particular struggle occupies a central role in our collective liberation from capitalism.

"The emancipation of society", wrote Marx in 1844, "is expressed in the political form of the emancipation of the workers; not that their emancipation alone is at stake, but because the emancipation of the workers contains universal human emancipation." (*Economic & Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*)

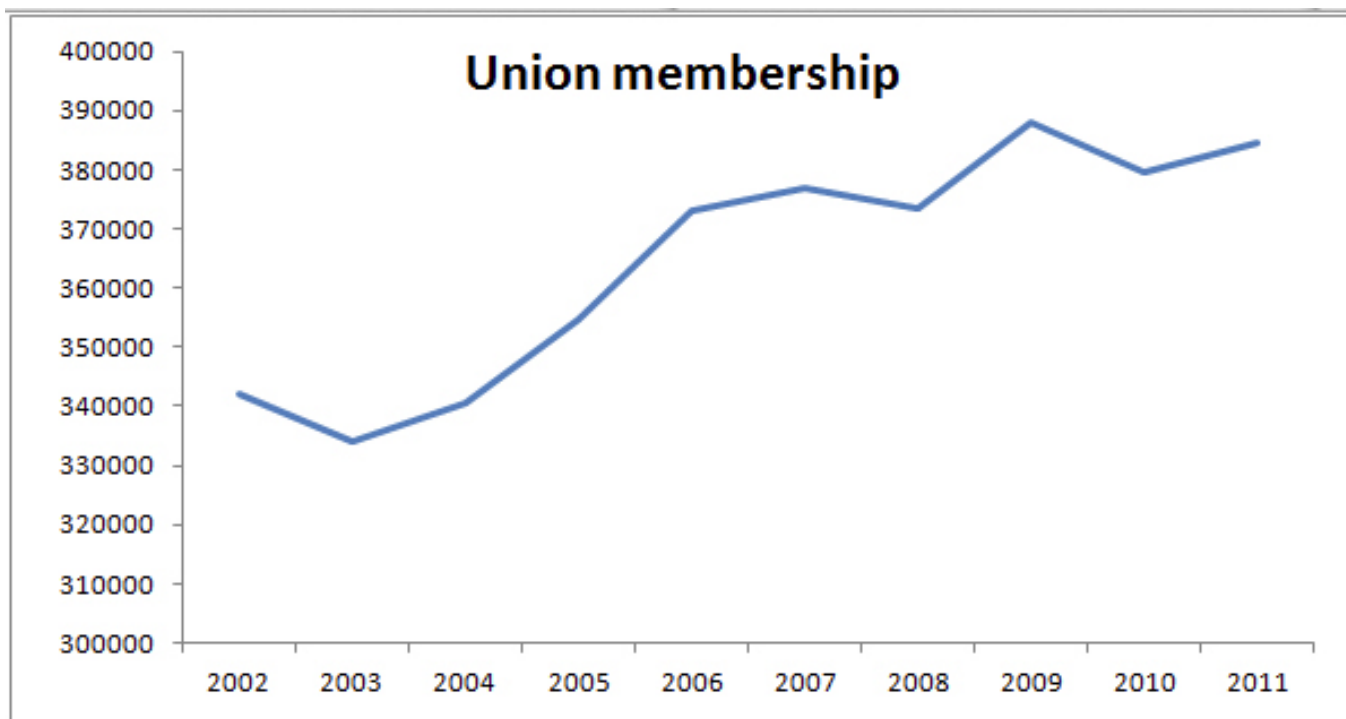
Which brings us back to unions and strikes. Trade unions are the main vehicle through which workers actively wage class struggle.

But as well as uniting workers in common struggle, unions also divide us – by trade, or occupational groupings. They operate within legal frameworks cre-

Employee compensation as share of GNI, 1972-2012



Industrial struggle



ated by the ruling class. They struggle over who gets what share of the wealth, not over who owns and controls the economy.

So they are not agents of revolutionary social transformation in themselves. But they do have a role in that process. They can be, as Marx reportedly described them, “schools for Socialism” (interview with Hamann, *Volkstaat*, No.17, 1869).

Returning to our question, though, is the class struggle in New Zealand at an end?

To help answer that, let’s look at some other data. This graph shows the share of Gross National Income (GNI) which is being secured for employees, over the last 40 years.

As you can see, despite the absence of industrial action over the last decade, the share of the country’s wealth going to workers is trending upwards.

There are two important caveats which have to go along with this observation. Firstly, the greater share going to employees conceals widening income inequality between high and low income earners.

And secondly, although recovering, our

share of National Income is still not even close to what it was before the neoliberal blitzkrieg of the 1980s and 1990s.

Even with these caveats, however, there remains an apparent contradiction. On the one hand, a lack of industrial struggle, and on the other, a rising share of the country’s wealth going to workers. How can we explain this?

Part of the explanation is found in union membership trends.

The upwards trend here matches the GNI graph.

Again, total union membership does not tell the whole story. The proportion of the workforce which is unionised is showing a gradual decline, down to 20.5% in 2012 from 21.5% in 2009.

And rising membership overall is based on strong growth in the public sector, concealing the continuing decline of private sector unionism.

But the most significant feature of the union membership data is this. Unlike the huge decline in strike action, there has been no corresponding collapse of working class organisation.

Here is another interesting set of numbers.

As you can see, collective bargaining is also holding up. And within that, there has been a growth in Multi-Employer Collective Agreements (MECAs).

This type of agreement unites workers across into larger groups, and strengthens bargaining power.

So these, I believe, are some of reasons why workers share of the wealth in New Zealand has been recovering slightly from the massive drop in of the 1980s and 1990s.

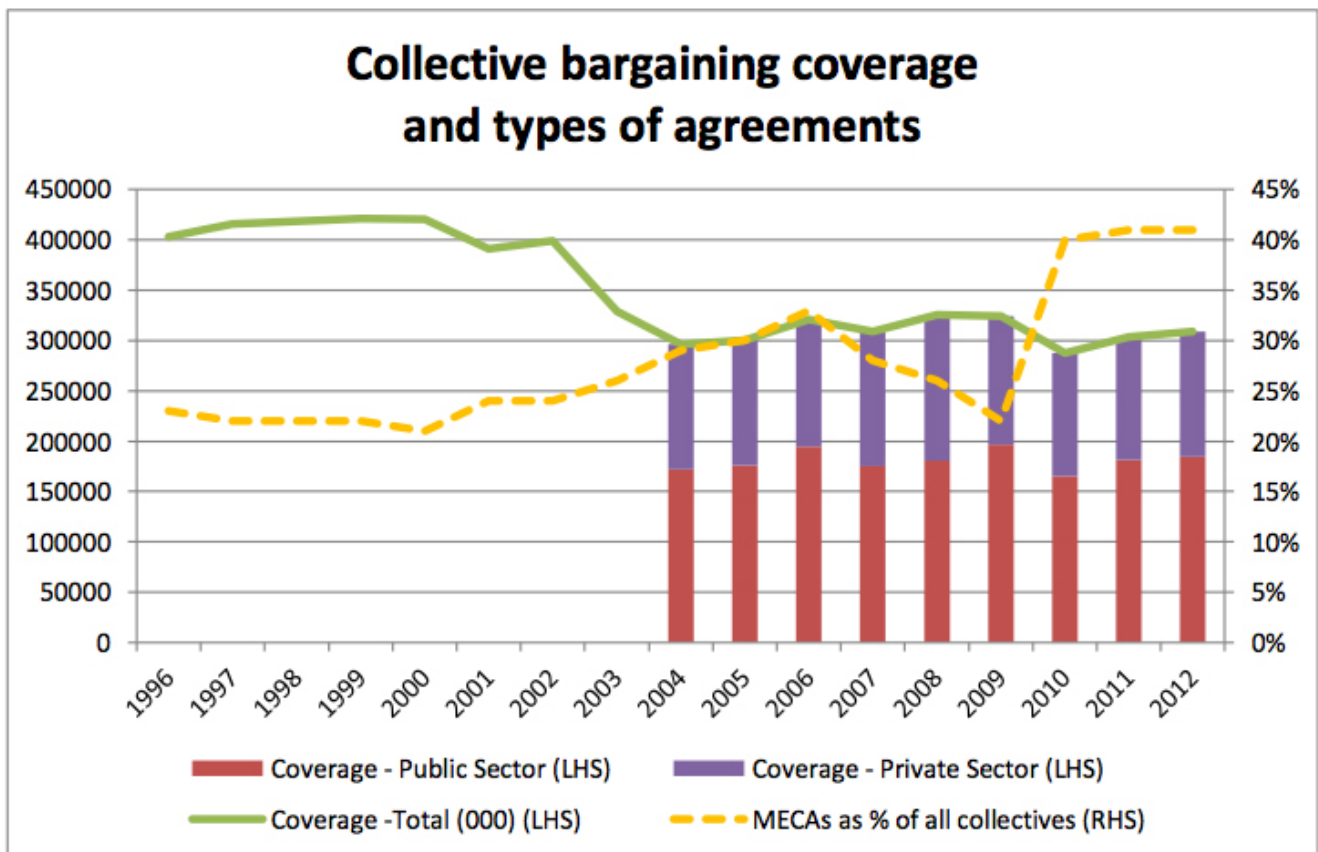
From these datasets, it appears the class struggle is alive and well.

Two obvious questions follow. Firstly, why are the stoppage figures today so incredibly low? And second, if the class struggle is very much alive, and if workers are not waging it through industrial action, then where the hell is it?

I think the answer to the first question lies in the nature of recent industrial action.

Beginning with the nurses’ Fair Pay campaign in 2003-4, New Zealand unions mounted a small wave of offensive

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struggles. That is, struggles to gain pay and power over and above what they had before.

These continued with the “5 in ‘05” campaign for pay rises of at least 5%, which was initiated by the Engineering Printing & Manufacturing Union, and taken up by some other affiliates to the Council of Trade Unions.

By about the time of the “Healthy Pay for Healthy Hospitals” campaign, waged by the Service & Food Workers Union Ngā Ringa Tota in 2006-7, this wave was coming to an end.

There still are some offensive struggles, such as Unite Union’s current campaign at McDonald’s, for parity with KFC workers. But since 2007, union action has been primarily defensive – aimed at retaining existing benefits.

The reason for this is twofold. Firstly, there was a shift in the political climate, which I’ll speak about shortly. And secondly, there was an industrial counter-offensive by employers.

Up until 2006, lockouts had been relatively rare events in New Zealand’s industrial history. In the decade preceding, they had averaged less than one a year.

But in 2006-7, there were four of them. After the epic lockout at Progressive Enterprises, manufacturing workers at Amcor Plastics were also locked out, as were coal miners at Rotowaro Mine, and then 800 hospital workers were locked out by Spotless Services.

Recently, there have been high profile lockouts in the dairy and meat industries and at Ports of Auckland.

The outcome of the lockouts in rural New Zealand in 2011-12 were mixed. At the Talleys-owned Open Country Cheese factory and at the AFFCO meat plants, they ended more or less in stalemate. The Dairy Workers Union and Meatworkers Union were not defeated, thanks to a huge solidarity campaign from across the union movement and – crucially – thanks to support from iwi leaders.

At Canterbury Meat Packers, however, the 35 day lockout in Marton ended with the union forced to accept pay cuts, and losing members. Although not as bad as it could have been, the workers were defeated.

Employer attempts to replicate these results in urban areas, however, have failed.

Concerted union struggles, from Progressive Enterprises in 2006 up until Ports of Auckland last year, have seen workers in the cities beat every employer lockout.

The dispute on the Auckland waterfront gave a glimpse of the potential economic power of workers. Over \$26 billion worth of exports pass through Ports of Auckland every year. As days of industrial action turned into weeks, support for the port company from nervous businesses started to wane.

Since the defeat of the port lockout in April last year, there have been no further lockouts in New Zealand.

So the reason for the historically low

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stoppage figures is this. Unions are in a defensive mode, responding only when attacked, and employers have concluded that militant attacks are not in their interests at present.

We are in a period of uneasy industrial peace, as unions and employers pursue the class struggle in another arena.

Where and how, then, are unions and workers waging class struggle today?

As usual, are struggling in the workplace, and periodically in collective bargaining. You can see evidence of economic struggle in bargaining here.

section of the class continues on the job and at the negotiating table, the front line of the class struggle today is in the political and legal arenas.

There, victories are being won, some of which are fueling the workers' rising share of national wealth.

The two biggest political campaigns are a defensive one, and an offensive one. The former is against the government's education reforms. The latter is to make the "Living Wage" a pay benchmark in New Zealand.

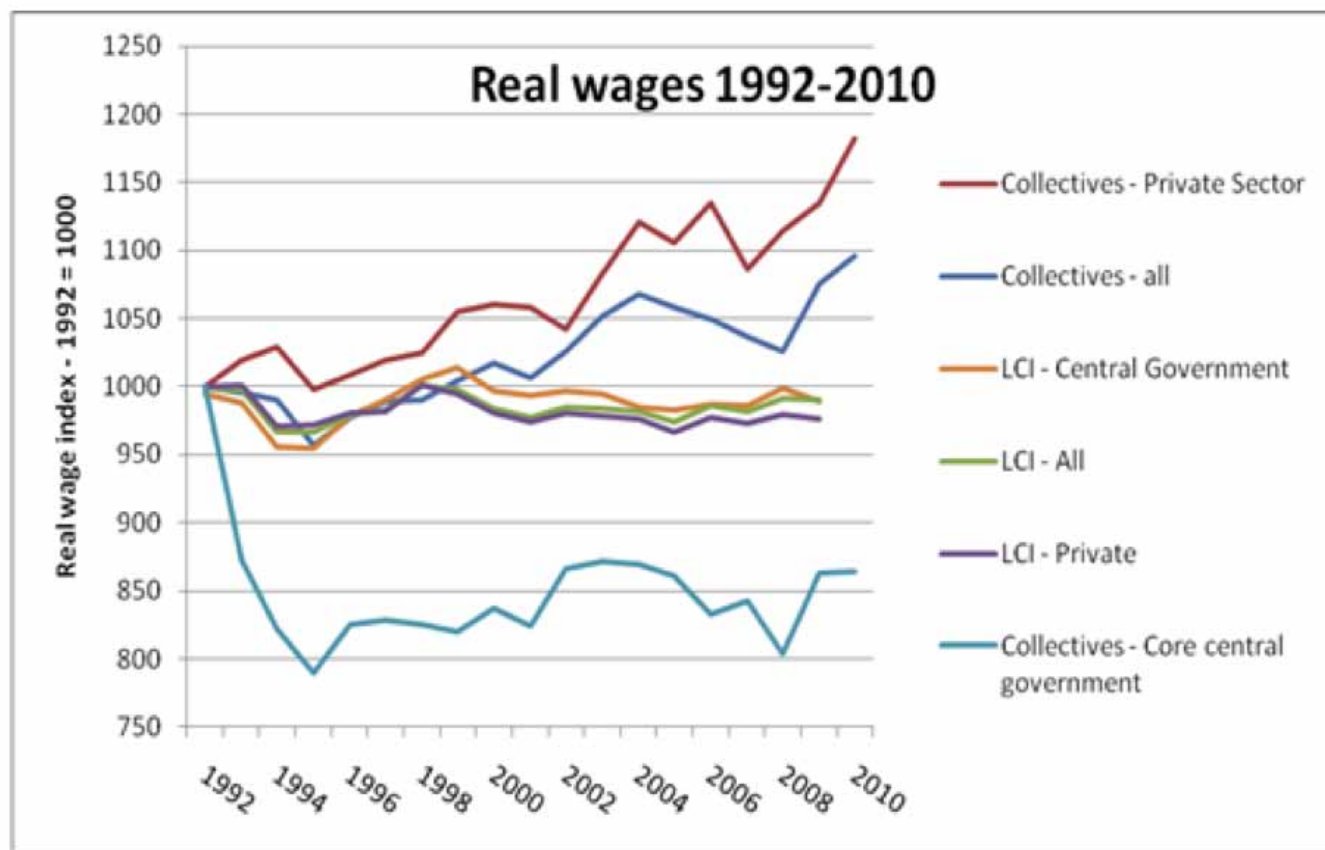
The education campaign has seen the

class sizes, meaning up to 6,000 school job losses. The unions mobilised and expressed a huge community backlash, and the government was forced to scrap that plan within weeks.

The outcome of the latest struggle, the fight against charter schools, is yet to be determined.

The Living Wage campaign, on the other hand, has already succeeded.

Launched by the Service & Food Workers Union Ngā Ringa Tota in May 2012, the aim of the campaign is to pressure employers into paying at least \$18.40



Wages for workers covered by collective bargaining are rising at a healthy rate. The specific feature of collective bargaining today, though, is that it's being concluded overwhelmingly without the use of industrial action.

Incidentally, the graph also shows that for the majority of workers who are not covered by collective agreements, real wages have been falling for a long time.

But while struggle in the unionised

teacher unions fighting a near-continuous series of rolling battles with the government for the last three years.

Some of these battles have ended in "points wins" for the government, such as the introduction of so-called national standards in primary schools.

Other battles have delivered knock-out wins for the teachers. Last year's Budget contained an announcement of larger

an hour.

Last month, The Warehouse announced it would support the Living Wage for thousands of employees with greater than three years service, boosting pay packets by around \$2.5 million a year.

Hamilton City Council followed suit, voting to raise staff pay by up to \$100 a week over the next two years. Auckland Council and Wellington City Council

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have also voted for moves towards the Living Wage. These are real gains for our class.

A key feature of all of the new wave of union-led political campaigns has been alliance-building. Unions have formed broad coalitions with community groups, as they broaden out their aims from the narrow defence of members' economic interests.

This shift has demonstrated in practice the Marxist view that workers struggle contains within itself universal human emancipation.

It is also demonstrating the central role of class struggle in historical change. The broad, union-led political struggles are starting to damage the government, and increase the chances that National will lose next year's general election.

As well as these political campaigns, the class struggle has also shifted into the courtroom.

The PSA and SFWU won a massive victory in legal action on behalf of thousands of disability and mental health support workers. The so-called "sleepover case", which ran for four years from 2007 until 2011, is going to deliver \$27 million in back pay.

Going forward, some workers will see their pay on overnight shifts quadruple, from an allowance worth \$3.77 per hour to the minimum wage of \$13.75 an hour, boosting these workers' earnings by a total of around \$50 million a year.

The SFWU is now preparing another major legal challenge, on behalf of women working in aged care, claiming that their low pay breaches the 1972 Equal Pay Act.

Little wonder, then, that after the failure of militant industrial tactics, employers have also moved their struggle into the political arena.

Here, the employers are on more favourable terrain. They are benefitting from

the shift in the political climate, consolidated by the election of the National government in 2008 and the dominant policy responses to the 2009 Global Financial Crisis.

Since 2009, employers have successfully secured three rounds of changes to employment law.

First, their government removed protections against unfair dismissal in the first 90 days for workers employed in small businesses.

Then in 2010 they legislated away all employee rights for workers in the film industry. And in a separate move, they changed several dozen laws, including allowing 90-day trial periods in all workplaces and allowing employers to limit union officials communication with members at work.

But these changes did not seriously dent working class power. As we have seen, this is based more on collective bargaining (especially MECA bargaining) and rising union membership, which in turn provides resources for political campaigning and legal action.

But this base is now being seriously attacked in the latest round of amendments to the Employment Relations Act.

These will effectively allow employers to break off collective bargaining, opt out of MECAs and significantly tilt the balance of class forces.

So this time it's serious. Unions are currently planning action to oppose the changes.

These law changes are reinforced by a general ideological offensive against working class entitlements, under the rubric of "austerity".

The ideological attacks can, and do confuse workers (both employed and unemployed). They pit us against each other and undermine our confidence to fight back.

And in the background there is a spectre haunting the working class – rising unemployment.

Finally, then, what are the practical implications of all this for activists? There are three main things socialists in the unions should be doing, given the current conditions of the class struggle?

1. We must maximise the ability of unions to unite workers, and overcome divisions between us.

In the first instance, this means defence of MECAs.

It means promotion of cross-union solidarity in struggle. We must encourage our fellow union members to support any group of workers involved in a dispute, and find practical ways to express that – whether it's a workplace collection or a signature on a letter of support.

And it means fostering coalitions between unions and community groups around broader working class interests.

2. We must maximise the ability of members to act collectively in their own interests.

This means strengthening union democracy.

Socialists in unions should stand for election as delegates. If elected, they should use the position to encourage discussion around issues of collective interest in the workplace, as well as wider class interests.

Delegates should enact collective decisions about what should be done – even if it's as simple as asking for a meeting with the manager.

Views and decisions of members also need to be conveyed to union leaders. At times, this will include views they oppose.

Within union-community coalitions, socialists can propose actions which involve working class people taking

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mass action for themselves in support of campaign goals.

3. And we must realise the potential of unions as “schools for socialism”, without ever being doctrinaire about what that means.

Remember, socialism is the system which results from the working class achieving political power. Wins achieved by union members acting for themselves – even small ones – can teach workers more about socialism

than a lecture from a book.

At the same time, however, unionists today need to be armed with arguments against austerity, against division and scapegoating.

This necessarily means bringing socialist ideas – from books, or from YouTube or branch discussions or wherever – into the workplace too.

We must help members see that political action is part of being a unionist.

And in special cases where socialists are in leading union roles, and where members are receptive – and I’m thinking particularly of Unite Union – there are special opportunities to make the union a school for socialism, through input into delegate training courses, articles in official union publications, and so on.

In these ways, those of us in unions can contribute to the class struggle for a socialist future today.



Unite's long fight for improvements at McDonald's

By Fightback writers

Unite union members employed at McDonald's have entered a campaign to fight for better pay and better hours of work. This is the fourth time that

Unite has negotiated over wages and conditions with McDonald's since the SupersizeMyPay campaign in 2005.

Before the SupersizeMyPay campaign there was no union agreement for McDonald's workers or other workers in the fastfood industry. The 2005

campaign brought good improvements at Restaurant Brands (KFC, Pizza Hut, Starbucks) stores. The improvements at McDonald's and Burger King were more modest. However McDonald's and Burger King Unite members got benefits from the first union agreement

being achieved in those workplaces for decades and from legislative changes that resulted from the campaign. The largest win was the removal of youth rates over a two-year period.

The SupersizeMyPay campaign seriously shook employers across the fast-food industry. The McDonald's bosses – especially individual franchisees – maintained a conscious fight against the union by victimising people who joined Unite. For example, in the case of Kaipoi McDonald's a membership of a whole store was bullied out of the union with the exception of one member. The remaining member and Unite challenged the employer. The McDonald's boss employer was fined, forced to pay damages to the employee, and forced to pay costs.

In 2008 the union began negotiations for its second collective agreement with McDonald's. The company stalled negotiations for months and the pay gap between McDonald's and Restaurant Brands workers continued to grow. McDonald's made a near-zero offer to its staff. The months of wage freeze were brought to an end by a significant industrial campaign by McDonald's workers in which there were more than 60 stoppages.

The result was a union agreement which secured specified amounts above minimum wage that the company had to pay to workers graded at various levels above minimum wage. This meant that all employees got an increase whenever the minimum wage went up. There were also percentage increases locked in for supervisory staff for each year of the agreement and other improvements to working conditions.

That campaign set a different tone with the company. The next agreement was resolved without strike action as the union had been able to negotiate a significant improvement regarding hours of work. In particular, a clause was entered into the agreement which provides that the company can't cut the hours of work of employees with one year or more

of service by any more than 25%. (Of course every agreement has resulted in a range of improvements and this article is concerned with the highlights and key issues).

This year the McDonald's bosses came to negotiations wanting the union to agree to a significant clawback, namely the reintroduction of youth rates. As with clawbacks in general, Unite was unwilling to concede. The government's reintroduction of youth rates creates an interesting situation. The company could have chosen to apply youth rates to young workers who don't belong to the union. However, if they did so they would have provided an incentive for all youth rates-aged employees who were not yet in the union to join the collective agreement. It is these types of expression of the union's power – not anything to do with the company's sham idea of corporate social responsibility – which ensured that the company could not implement youth rates. The fact that the company has been unable to implement youth rates is a source of confidence in the union and its potential to make real changes.

The deflection of the implementation of youth rates, however, is not enough for McDonald's workers to settle on a new agreement. The company made a narrow final offer consisting of a one-off increase of 25 cents. Wages and conditions need to go forward or the workers will face wage stagnation and real wage decline. One aspect of pushing on wages has been to raise the demand that the McDonald's bosses must agree to pay at least the same as what other fast-food chains pay.

Hours of work is the other key issue. The union routinely deals with cases whereby workers are exposed to insecurity of work. It means that people cannot plan their weeks or budget properly. In many instances this insecurity is used as a management tool to prevent people from standing up to frequent abuses of the work legislation and the union agreement. Over the years Unite has

made significant inroads on this issue, but the workforce understands that such improvements need to be deepened as well as extended to cover the broadest possible number of workers. Only then will there be anything approaching a satisfying situation for the employees.

This round of negotiations has been difficult so far but this is not because of the resolve of the employees and their union. The difficulty has been due to the external situation whereby there have been rafters of anti-worker employment legislation changes and significant attacks on unions, such as at Ports of Auckland, and at meat processing plants. Such attacks by the government and employer's at traditional union strongholds have given confidence to the McDonald's bosses and other employers.

McDonald's employees have responded with actions across the country. As well as gaining public support on basic issues like wages and conditions, specific events have put a spotlight on other issues. For example the company's favouritism towards the police, expressed in special police discounts, has been exposed. Additionally a store management's discrimination against a gay worker has been uncovered.

The resistance of Unite members is required for their own wage negotiations and for continuing to make gains for workers in the fast-food industry in general. It is necessary because companies like McDonald's are part of a whole class of employers who are holding down wages as a response to the economic crisis. Their resistance symbolises a point of resistance against the green light that the government has given employers; a green light to attack wages and conditions.

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Unite takes on McDonald's in high stakes fight for low-paid workers

Originally printed by Green Left Weekly (Australia). By Joel Cosgrove, Wellington Fightback member.

After a relatively quiet couple of years, the Unite union, which organises fast food and other previously unorganised sectors, has burst into action with a vigorous industrial campaign against McDonald's.

The key demands are focused around winning a NZ\$15 starting wage, an end to casualised hours, a fair and transparent roster system and a number of union-only benefits, most of which have already been won by KFC Unite members.

Unite gained national attention when it began its SupersizeMyPay.com campaign in 2005. The campaign focused on developing union membership in the

fast food industry, as well as campaigning for a \$12 minimum wage and an end to youth pay rates.

The campaign achieved collective contracts in most of the major fast food chains McDonald's, Burger King (Hungry Jacks in Australia) and Restaurant Brands (KFC, Carls Jr, Starbucks, Pizza Hutt) for the first time since the end of compulsory unionism in the 1980s.

This was not an easy or smooth process. There were lightning strikes, wildcat strikes and walkouts. There was more initial success at Restaurant Brands (especially KFC), where union density was higher and management resistance towards the union was less deep-set than at McDonald's.

McDonald's have an international structure centred on McDonald's HQ at Oak Brook, Illinois and "Hamburger

University" — a 12,000 square metre complex.

McDonald's claims its "university" to be "the company's global center of excellence for McDonald's operations training and leadership development", churning out 5000 graduates a year and claiming to have graduated more than 80,000 "students".

The role of the university is to centralise the company's indoctrination process, building a consciously crafted global corporate culture. In New Zealand, this has been reflected in a culture of bullying, intimidation and anti-unionism that is spread through local operations.

McDonald's has never been willing to give an inch. Every win has been heavily fought for.

The current dispute revolves around an offer of a \$0.25 increase in all rates over

a two year period. For those on starting rates, that is actually just the government mandated rise to the minimum wage.

An even more extreme perspective is held by most franchisee owners, who have expressed a desire to not even have collective contracts.

Unite has been building members numbers for several years now. The claims being put forward are being compared to the conditions already won by KFC workers. This example has been very useful to date in putting forward their example as a way forward for McDonald's workers to begin the struggle for improved conditions.

In light of the miserly offer from the company and hostility from franchisee owners, 85% of members voted in support of industrial action in a recent nationwide ballot.

The process of starting this campaign has unearthed a raft of complaints and issues at McDonald's nationwide. Most prominent was the revelation that union member Sean Bailey was told by a manager that "if you act gay on my shift, I will discipline you" and "if you turn

anyone else in the store gay, I will punish you and make you lose your job".

Similar issues of bullying and harassment have come to light, including not being able to take breaks and not being paid for overtime.

At a demonstration in Auckland with about 30 members and supporters, a large contingent of police arrived and roughly pushed away protesters who had been blocking access to an inner-city McDonald's store. Police claimed the protesters were negatively affecting custom to the store, something the union stated was its right.

In the furore over the issue, Unite members in McDonald's and other fast food stores brought up the issue of police getting free or heavily discounted food.

Although initially denied, a police spokesperson then scoffed at the idea that police could be "brought off" with burgers. McDonald's said individual franchisee owners made the decision to give discounts to "emergency services workers".

This was shown to be an insultingly mockery of the truth when a union

member supplied to media a photo showing a button titled "police promo" on their electronic tills.

In the aftermath of these revelations, police officers provided anonymous statements about being disgusted at other officers' taking these perks. Fast food workers came forward with similar stories and the police and police minister had to retract their statements from two days earlier.

Union pickets in the South Island have been driven into by customers seemingly desperate for their cheeseburger fix. Overall though, members of the public have been supportive of the campaign. There have been very few attempts to break picket lines in Wellington recently and fewer still managing to get through. Pickets and protests have been marked by strong support from both pedestrians and passing vehicles.

A Unite "war council" has been formed in Wellington to coordinate the protests and strikes. Auckland are holding a "McStrike Training Day" to build the skills, contacts and networking that is required to win.

McDonald's vs Unite: Queer Power, Workers' Power

by Ian Anderson, Wellington Fightback member.

While negotiations between McDonald's and Unite Union have broken down, a recent case of homophobia has also inflamed solidarity actions across Aotearoa/NZ.

Sean Bailey, a worker at the Quay Street McDonald's in Auckland, reported to the Herald:

"One of my managers said, 'if you act gay on my shift, I will discipline you'.

"He also said, 'if you turn anyone else

in the store gay, I will punish you and make you lose your job'."

Bailey said the comments made him embarrassed to return to work.

"I had to call in sick just because I couldn't work with him, which meant I lost work hours and money."

Once the managers' behavior was exposed, McDonald's moved him to another store, in a move described as the "Catholic church solution" to homophobia.

Demonstrations against homophobia in Auckland and Wellington

In Auckland, Unite called a "Turn McDonald's Gay" action outside Britomart McDonald's. Dozens of supporters chanted and danced to pop songs including YMCA. According to GayNZ, Sean Bailey thanked the group and commented, "McDonald's need to sort out the discrimination in the workforce. It needs to make sure it's not allowed in our restaurants."

In Wellington, the Queer Avengers held a small but solid action outside Manners Mall McDonald's. Demonstrators chanted, "Queer power! Union power!"

Industrial struggle

and “When queer workers are under attack, stand up fight back.” Liaising with Unite delegates, Fightback played an active role in organizing and supporting this action.

The coming weeks will see more demonstrations and industrial action across the country.

McDonald's: Corporate “gay rights” stance

At a corporate level, McDonald's appear to support lesbian & gay rights. The company has run gay-friendly ads in France, has a relationship with the National Gay & Lesbian Chamber of Commerce in the USA, and corporate heads such as former CEO Jim Skinner have spoken out in support of gay rights.

However, queer workers still face multiple-oppression. Since queer workers do not control the means of production, they are forced to rely on bosses who will use whatever tools are available to crush fightback.

Homophobia is part of the arsenal of bullying tactics used by managers to control workers. Especially at franchisee-owned McDonald's stores, reports of bullying behaviour from

managers are routine.

Aotearoa/NZ: Legal equality, social oppression

Recently in Aotearoa/NZ, the basic democratic demand of same-sex marriage rights passed through parliament. Adult, monogamous same-sex couples now have the same legal rights as their heterosexual counterparts.

However, gender and sexual oppression remains embedded in social relations. It reveals itself when a manager tells a worker not to “act gay,” when parents kick their children out for their gender identity, when schools tolerate bullying of queer/trans youth.

Capitalism demands certain performances, certain embodiments of gender. It demands that we perform certain kinds of work; that women perform the bulk of unpaid work, with little assistance from the state, while men perform the bulk of paid work; and it tries to fit a wide spectrum of gender and sexuality into these boxes.

Queer power, workers' power

McDonald's' workers struggle is con-

nected to the struggle against homophobia. Workers' rights must mean the right to be open about our sexual orientation, our political associations, and other parts of our life that managers don't happen to like. Technically discrimination against gay employees is illegal, but just like neglect of wage rights, it is also normal in hospitality and retail.

Unite is currently struggling for parity between McDonald's and KFC, while McDonald's has offered a miniscule 25 cents over the next two years. Winning this dispute will not end oppression. However, with each victory and each defeat, we must aim to build a socialist movement that actively challenges all forms of oppression.

Currently McDonald's makes millions from exploiting and oppressing workers. If this wealth were socialised, it could be directed towards support for queer youth among other social purposes.

This is a struggle for self-determination, for a world in which our work and our gender presentation is not micro-managed for profit. To borrow a phrase from Marx, we fight for a world where “the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all.”



First McDonald's strike ever in Wellington

by Joel Cosgrove

The first McDonald's strike ever in Wellington happened today.

At 8am 5 of the 7 workers on shift came off the job and joined the picket line that had been set up outside Bunny St McDonald's. It was a noisy, lively affair, with Fightback member and Wellington Unite Union organizer Heleyni Pratley leading the way with chants, songs and the occasional speech to the people passing by, explaining why the strike was being held and why the public needed to respect the picket line. Few people tried to break the picket line set up outside the main door and fewer still managed to force their way in.

Management had at the last moment rostered on more non-union staff in an attempt to keep the store running. Yet with few people in the store, the level of

staffing was irrelevant. With numerous cars tooting their support, McDonald's management attempted to give our free vouchers to try and entice members of the public to break the picket and come into the store, but after a public service announcement over the megaphone explaining what these vouchers represented, a large amount of people were seen to chuck them in the gutters, still wet from the sporadic rain.

A member of the striking staff spoke briefly on the megaphone about their experiences on the floor, of being paid minimum wage.

The picket was a lively affair, with about 25 present a mix of socialists, activists and trade unionists from FIRST Union, the Postal Workers Union of Aotearoa, the NZ Nurses Organisation and the New Zealand Education.

After half an hour, the members went

back into the store with Heleyni accompanying them to make sure that management (including the franchise owner, who had arrived and stood at the back of the store looking darkly at the picket line outside) didn't threaten or attempt to discipline the workers for standing up and striking.

While it was a short demonstration, this is an escalation of the struggle for increased conditions for Unite members in McDonald's and in the wider fast food industry. A number of KFC members have already made it clear that a weak McDonald's collective, undermines their own ability to fight for better wages and conditions. 85% of unionised McDonald's workers nationwide have voted for strike action.

A Unite Union 'War Council' has been formed in Wellington to coordinate demonstrations and strikes amongst members and supporters.



Fightback supports McDonald's as part of socialist conference

by Ian Anderson

Fightback actively supported unionised McDonald's workers as part of its 2013 conference. On the evening of Saturday the 1st of June, members and supporters distributed nearly 2000 leaflets across Wellington McDonald's sites; Newtown, the Basin Reserve, Courtenay Place, Taranaki Street, Lambton Quay,

Manners Mall and Bunny Street (which recently took strike action).

Fightback's leaflet explained "Why we support McDonald's workers – and why you should too." The leaflet explained how both workers' action and wider public solidarity are needed to overcome casualisation and low wages, at McDonald's and elsewhere.

Customers were generally receptive, with some at the Manners Mall store

even taking and distributing bunches of leaflets themselves.

Coming weeks will see further actions, including demonstrations and strikes. Fightback will continue to support and, where possible, initiate these actions. We see this campaign as part of a broader struggle for working class solidarity and self-organisation.

McDonald's U.S.

USA: We'd like a living wage with that order

While workers in Aotearoa/NZ strike and demonstrate for improved pay and conditions from McDonald's, this struggle also has an international dimension. This report on an industrial campaign against McDonald's in Detroit, USA, is reprinted from Socialist Worker (USA). By Aaron Petkov, with contributions from Marie Bucks.

Managers of the Detroit McDonald's on Gratiot Avenue, northeast of the city center, discovered at 6 a.m. on May 10 that the restaurant was being picketed by about 20 striking employees. When they called other employees to come to work for a replacement shift, the other workers started arriving...and joined the picket line. The Gratiot Avenue McDonald's stayed closed.

That was just one of the stories from Detroit as more than 400 employees at fast-food restaurants across the city went on strike and took to the streets on May 10. Nationwide, this was the fourth such strike in the past several months--previous walkouts have taken place in New York City, Chicago and St. Louis. Since the Detroit action, workers in Milwaukee have also gone on strike.

Throughout the day, workers and their supporters rallied outside chain restaurants like McDonald's, Popeyes, Taco Bell and Burger King, gathering at the end of the day for a climactic march in the city's New Center area. Like similar walkouts in other cities, the main demands of the coalition, calling itself D15, were for a raise in the minimum wage to a living wage of \$15 an hour and the right to form a union.

The strike was particularly significant for a city as devastated as Detroit. Over a quarter of the city's families survive on less than \$15,000 a year, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. Low-paying fast-food chains are among the largest employers in the city, with twice as

many workers as the once historic auto industry.

"We can't raise no child off of \$7.40," Savannah, a worker on strike at Taco Bell, said in an interview. "I can't pay rent. I can't pay bills. I can't pay my phone bill or nothing. It's ridiculous, and I think we should get paid \$15 for it."

Over 50 fast-food locations across the city were affected by the strikes. Several locations were shut down or only opened the drive-thru. Managers at several locations attempted to keep their restaurants running by calling employees in to work on their day off. However, at many locations, many replacement workers joined the strike upon their arrival.

McDonald's Executives responded to the strike in Detroit with a written statement claiming that their "employees are paid competitive wages and have access to a range of benefits to meet their individual needs."

This claim is laughable. Such lip service contrasts starkly with the actual experiences of their employees and other fast-food workers. One McDonald's worker named Jay Robinson told reporters that when he started at McDonald's over two years ago, he was paid \$7.40 an hour. Robinson has gotten raises since then--and now makes \$7.48 an hour.

He has to try to make do with this to take care of himself and his 2-year-old daughter. "It's a day-to-day struggle," he told reporters. "And the owners make millions."

Robinson's observation is dead on. The low wages that fast-food restaurants pay are a big reason why the companies rake in exorbitant profits. They're among the largest businesses in the U.S. economy. Fast-food chains are expecting revenues of \$200 billion in 2013. McDonald's has already earned \$1.27 billion in profits in just the first three months of the year. Total compensation for its new

CEO came to \$13.8 million in 2012. For the old CEO who was replaced in the middle of 2012, his total compensation last year was \$27.7 million.

David Novak, CEO of Yum Brands, which owns Taco Bell and KFC, among other chains, raked in total compensation \$29.7 million last year. It would take the average Taco Bell crew member, working full-time and year-round, nearly 2,000 years to earn as much as Novak made in 2012.

The demand of low-wage workers for a \$15 an hour living wage goes far beyond what the politicians in Washington have put forward, even in rhetoric. During his State of the Union address, President Obama proposed an increase in the federal minimum wage to \$9 an hour. While this proposal may appear generous, a full-time employee working for \$9 an hour would only earn \$18,000 a year--still below the federal poverty level for a family of three.

Moreover, the proposal is still a step backwards from Obama's 2008 campaign promise to raise the minimum wage to \$9.50 an hour by the end of his first two years in office. He did nothing to make good that promise, even though Democrats controlled both chambers of Congress in those two years.

Now, Obama and the Democrats are likewise doing nothing to honor the president's State of the Union promise. In this context, the bold action taken by low-wage workers in the fast-food and retail sector is even more encouraging.

The strikes in Detroit, backed by a coalition that includes the Service Employees International Union and other labor organizations, comes at a moment of existential crisis for organized labor in Michigan.

Last December, the Republican-controlled state legislature rushed through a right-to-work law after voters rejected a

McDonald's U.S./racism

union-backed referendum last November to amend the state's constitution to guarantee collective bargaining rights. The union drew tens of thousands to a rally in Lansing last December to protest the bill, but they were unable to stop it from passing. Detroit's fast-food workers strikes are the first such strikes to occur in a right-to-work state.

Detroit has also had an emergency manager imposed on the city by Republican Gov. Rick Snyder. The emergency manager has unilateral authority to restructure city services, finances and even labor contracts, with no oversight by the city's elected officials.

The potential, however, for actions by low-wage workers fighting for justice to galvanize the labor movement was well illustrated at the strike's closing rally at the headquarters of the Detroit Federation of Teachers (DFT). The DFT was hit hard when former Democratic Gov. Jennifer Granholm put the Detroit Public Schools under emergency management in 2009. As a result, the DFT headquarters is largely abandoned and is up for sale.

But on May 10, the energy of the hundreds of low-wage, unorganized fast-food workers and their supporters, marching and protesting after a long

day of historic strike action, provided a hopeful contrast to the large, yellow "For Sale" sign hanging from the façade of the DFT headquarters.

Detroit has an inspiring legacy of struggle. The anger, energy and hope that fast-food workers displayed during strike revealed that, despite decades of crisis, the spirit of that legacy stubbornly persists. Shinesa, a striking worker from a local Taco Bell, eloquently expressed this: "They work you like a slave. I'm tired of it. I'm fed up. And I think it's time we did something about it."

Racism and recession in Aotearoa/NZ

Working class unity needed to defend rights and living standards

This article is adapted from an article by Jared Phillips, Hamilton Fightback member. Originally published in The Socialist, magazine of the Socialist Party of Australia.

Several recent events have elevated the issue of racism in New Zealand. In one case a nationalist MP belonging to the Danish People's Party made headlines when she made racist comments about a traditional Maori welcome.

Also Susan Devoy, who is unsympathetic to Maori political issues, was appointed as the new Race Relations Commissioner. At the same time National Party Prime Minister John Key has tried to stoke fears about South Asian refugee boats coming to New Zealand. This is despite no boats arriving so far.

To top things off a bunch of neo-Nazis staged a so-called 'white pride' march in Christchurch. These events vary in significance but taken together they have created increased controversy and more discussion in society about ethnicity and issues of racism.

“ As Malcolm X once said “you can't have capitalism without racism”. This explains why when capitalist governments set up human rights institutions they are generally toothless tigers.

New race relations appointment

The appointment of former champion squash player, Susan Devoy, to the position of Race Relations Commissioner is seen by many as a right-wing provocation. Prior to her appointment Devoy had become an outspoken conservative. In particular she had criticised the wearing of burqas and had chastised Maori for raising political issues on Waitangi Day.

Waitangi Day is a national holiday

which marks the anniversary of a Treaty of Waitangi signing ceremony in 1840. For decades the Waitangi day anniversary has been used by Maori as an occasion for forums and symbolic peaceful protests to address Maori issues.

In reality the treaty was a tool of annexation but it contained important promises to Maori, including self-governance through chieftainship. With such promises not being adhered to the Treaty is seen as a rallying point of Maori resistance. Maori call for such aspects of the treaty to be honoured.

Criticism quickly followed Devoy's appointment especially because she is completely unqualified. She responded by saying that she is a "quick learner" with "a good moral compass".

Devoy's view is that Waitangi day should not be used by Maori for political "shenanigans". The truth is that it's precisely that type of outlook – a refusal to recognise deep historical injustices – that qualified Devoy for the position in the eyes of the government.

Even some of the conservative press think that her appointment is a step too far with one editorial commenting that: "She is politically and perhaps culturally naive... which does not fit well with

Racism

someone who will be expected to mediate in complex matters involving racial discrimination and human rights.”

Devoy has ignored requests for interviews. This led to the farcical incident where her associate told a TV crew that she was asleep in her house and couldn't be interviewed. Soon after the TV crew then captured footage of her driving past!

Even when asked, Devoy didn't feel that the 'white pride' march in Christchurch warranted her comment. When the nationalist Danish People's Party MP said about the Maori welcome: "To me it looked grotesque, it looked very strange with a man who is half naked and in a grass skirt and who poked his tongue out and was shouting" Devoy didn't think that warranted her comment either.

It was also exposed in *The Listener* magazine that Devoy's 1993 autobiography contained passages where she complained about not being able to enter lucrative sports contracts in apartheid South Africa. She wrote up a list of pros and cons when deciding whether she would tour there. Far from considering human rights of black South Africans, the list merely weighed up the financial benefits of touring.

Devoy's appointment has triggered a heightened discussion about racism. So much so that the prime time current affairs show 'Campbell Live' ran a segment on the everyday racism experienced by Maori. An experiment was conducted whereby a Caucasian male and a Maori male with the same appearance (same clothes, same car, etc) visited a range of petrol stations asking to fill up before paying.

The Caucasian male was allowed to fill-up before paying at the outlets of five different petrol brands. The Maori male was required to pre-pay for the petrol at the outlets of four of the five brands. This was despite his overly-polite approaches at the counters. The exercise gave an insight into everyday discrimi-

nation experienced by Maori and the failures of institutions like the Human rights Commission to do anything to undermine racism in New Zealand.

Human rights institutions

The Race Relations Commissioner in New Zealand is a functionary of the Human Rights Commission. The Commission is supposed to advocate for human rights, consult with groups concerned with protecting human rights, inquire into matters which infringe on human rights, develop a national plan to promote and protect human rights and take part in court proceedings relating to human rights. It reports to the Prime Minister.

Despite the presence of human rights bodies in most advanced countries human rights are routinely abused both at home and abroad. In the main this is because adhering to human rights often runs counter to the needs of capitalism – a system based on production for private profit rather than the general needs of all people.

Under capitalism human rights are seen as subordinate to the rights of capitalists to make profits. Because of this racism is a by-product of the profit system. As Malcolm X once said "you can't have capitalism without racism". This explains why when capitalist governments set up human rights institutions they are generally toothless tigers.

While socialists have no confidence in these institutions we are open to using their existence, in conjunction with mass movements and campaigns, to assist in winning reforms for oppressed people. For example an appeal to human rights bodies can be useful when someone is facing discrimination in the workplace and there is not sufficient strength to defeat the employer by industrial means.

Human rights, like all rights, are not just granted to people by the capitalist class. Historically rights have been

fought for, and won, through struggle. When society slides into crisis we often see that the capitalists try and wind democratic freedoms and rights back. This is seen in many pieces of anti-democratic legislation put forward in recent years. As the economic crisis gets worse we will increasingly need to defend both our living standards and our rights.

The need for class unity

Against the backdrop of recession, and a deepening world economic crisis, the ruling class will increasingly try to divide the working class in order to weaken it. From their point of view it is much easier to make ordinary people pay for the economic crisis via cuts and austerity measures if people are divided along racial and ethnic lines.

What the ruling class fears the most is the entire working class uniting and acting together to oppose their attacks on our living standards. We must not let the likes of Susan Devoy or John Key use the public discourse to drive wedges between groups of people who are all under attack.

Working people, the unemployed, students and all those in society who are oppressed have an interest in working together to ensure we are not made to pay for an economic crisis that was created by the capitalists. We have more in common with each other than we do with those who exploit us. Through our trade unions, community groups and parties like Mana we need to fight for jobs, homes and services for all.

Solidarity is necessary to overcoming racism. Our living standards can be both defended and extended thereby laying the basis for a new type of society which is based on human need and not profit. This type of society would use the wealth created to provide for all and make discrimination and oppression a thing of the past. Genuine human rights would be a top priority. This is the type of world that socialists fight for.

Politics and the mental health consumer movement

by Polly Peek, Christchurch Fightback member.

As a socialist and mental health consumer, I was recently excited to discover 'The C Word,' a blog on the Changing Minds website.

Changing Minds is a consumer organisation based in Auckland. Engaging in systemic advocacy and activism, the group acts as a network of mutual support for people who have used mental health services and want to be involved in improving the health system.

What's exciting about this organisation and the information they're providing for mental health consumers, is that they seem to be taking an openly political approach to their work, recognising the impact our material conditions have on all other aspects of our lives – including health and wellbeing.

The first C word examined in the changing minds blog is Capitalism.

"Capitalism" the author states, "is bad for my health. And in my opinion, it's bad for everyone's health". Issues related to low wages and systemic unemployment are raised, and the inability to maintain a work-life balance within the present economic system is related to the people's needs for rest, particularly where someone is managing mental distress.

The article goes on to discuss how the polarities of full-time or over-employment and unemployment are legitimised through an ideological equation of full-time work with full citizenship – a status unattainable to many mental health consumers due to the demanding nature of work under capitalism.

It is interesting to consider this blog post in relation to the politics of the wider mental health consumer movement.

The beginnings of the consumer movement worldwide were politically radical.

“...the consumer movement over-emphasises individuals' rights to 'shop around' for good mental health care, while neglecting to develop a more systemic analysis of the disadvantages faced by people with mental illness.

Forming in the 1960's and 1970's out of the atmosphere of the civil rights movement, the mental health consumer movement began as the Psychiatric Survivors movement.

Organisations formed with names like the Mental Patients' Union and the Mental Patients' Liberation Front, indicating their strong stance against the oppressive and alienating system of psychiatric confinement and care.

The psychiatric survivor movement at the time was in many ways linked to a new theoretical approach to mental health and illness. Anti-psychiatry challenged the medical model of mental illness, seeing distress as something very much tied up with a person's social environment, not merely a case of brain chemistry.

With its new conception of unwellness, anti-psychiatry also made new demands of treatment – to understand people and their symptoms in a social context of the family or community, and to support people within society rather than isolating people away in institutions. It

also made demands of wider society to no longer disadvantage, oppress and marginalise the mental health community.

In the last few decades, the psychiatric survivors' movement evolved, becoming the consumer movement. The consumer movement has reflected the politics of its time, being more individually focussed, seeing legislation and policy establishing patient rights as a major way forward, and reframing people who experience distress as active consumers of services, rather than passive patients.

Informed choice has been a central pillar of how this movement sees the lives of service-users improving. If everyone has access to full information about the treatment options available, we can be considered more personally responsible for our wellbeing and are thus more empowered.

Radical critiques of this movement find its obvious flaws. Situated within the political context of neo-liberalism, the consumer movement over-emphasises individuals' rights to 'shop around' for good mental health care, while neglecting to develop a more systemic analysis of the disadvantages faced by people with mental illness.

Such a systemic analysis might take into consideration the poverty faced by many with mental illness, which creates real, structural barriers to the informed free-market consumer ideal of recent mental health movements.

Along with poverty, the mental health community also anecdotally reports structural barriers to attaining education, engaging in work, having our physical health needs met, finding secure housing and maintaining social connections due to societal stigma and discrimination.

With these significant issues illuminat-

Mental health/eco-socialism

ed, further limitations of the consumer movement, with its predominant focus on mental health care options, become apparent. In fact, even the approach to health care options is problematic when we consider how these options are created – usually in the interest of established corporate powers such as the pharmaceutical industry.

Despite the general shift in politics over time, there has never been one blanket ideology of the mental health movement, and it is arguable whether we can even refer to a singular movement of people with lived experience at all.

There have always been different priorities for different groups, often impacted by the local political context and the ideals of members involved.

What I hope is happening at the moment though, is that the pockets of radicalism that have existed in organisations like the Icarus Project and Mad Pride, are growing, and flavouring the broad collective of mental health movements, and mental health discourse on the whole.

What makes me excited reading *The C Word*, and recently talking to consumers involved in VOX a Scottish network

who are actively protesting welfare reforms, is that I sense, and hope, that consumer movement is evolving again.

The global political context is one of recession and austerity, of uprising, refusal to accept the status quo and community action. A mental health movement that reflects the world we are living in is needed, and the possibilities for this kind of movement are extensive.

Let's continue the conversation that *Changing Minds* has boldly started, and consider how radical politics can be a focus for people involved in mental health, and vice versa.

Green is red: The case for eco-Marxist politics

by Daphne Lawless, Auckland Fightback member.

It seems to be common sense that socialism and green politics go together. “Green is red”, wrote English socialist Paul McGarr more than ten years ago. On the other side of the aisle, the Right often refer to the Green Party as “watermelons” (that is, red on the inside – secretly socialist). The Green Parties, for their turn, like to deny this connection, often declaring themselves “neither left nor right but out in front”. And many Marxists don't want to have anything to do with this supposedly privileged middle-class movement for that very reason.

However, ecosocialism is – in brief – the idea that you can't have green politics without red politics. That is: that you can't have an environmentally sustainable society under capitalism and its almighty profit motives. And you can't have a socialist society which ignores ecological sustainability and quality of life in favour of producing mass quantities of consumer goods. I want to argue that, while ecosocialism has been for the last 25 years or so “the wave of the

future”, it is now very much the wave of the present.

Marx and Ecology

Ecosocialism is the descendant of a Marxism which comes from “bottom up” – a Marxism which takes as its start and end point the lived experience of human beings on this planet. Marxism, as a philosophy which seeks to liberate humanity from alienation, is most widely known as the theory of how capitalism alienates the working class from the produce of their labour. But Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels also discussed how it alienates human beings from nature.

The American socialist writer John Bellamy Foster has shown that Marx's early writings are very clear that capitalism creates a “metabolic rift” between social systems and ecological systems. Through the town-country division of labour, natural resources, including the plant and animal kingdoms, waterways and space itself, become seen as inert objects waiting to be transformed into goods for profit. And of course this applied also to the workers themselves – the worker is not valued for her or his humanity, but only as a source of po-

tential profit for the boss. Capitalism is a system of exploitation of all of nature – including people.

The increasing push for resources under industrial capitalism leads to both environmental damage and heightening of capitalist competition. For example, in 19th century England farming was transformed by the increased use of chemical fertiliser – but the increasing yield of crops led to soil degradation. Meanwhile, imperialist wars were fought over tiny islands rich in guano (bird droppings) which could be used to make fertiliser.

However, this also has an effect on human well-being. The growth of industrial cities led to an urban environment fouled and polluted as much as a rural environment – especially for the working masses who flocked to these cities from the country. We can see a very similar process (the wearing out of the countryside under exploitation combined with the growth of tenement cities) in modern China. Foul, cramped, soulless working and living conditions are as much a product of capitalist alienation as the expropriation of surplus value.



Satellite images of the Aral Sea demonstrate the damage done by Climate Change.

Soviet Russia's eco-disaster

The first argument which is thrown back at ecosocialists is that the 20th century European and Asian states which called themselves socialist were hardly environmental success stories. This is true. But in this lies the fundamental difference between ecosocialism and these bureaucratically mismanaged state-run economies.

Just like capitalist economies, the Soviet Union was determined to push for economic growth at all costs – to keep up with the West and defend itself. Referring to industrialisation, Josef Stalin is reported to have said: “We must do in ten years what England did in a hundred”. And a process running at ten times the speed was ten times as brutal. We need only mention a few examples – the mass famines following the collectivization of agriculture, which killed millions in the Ukraine. The Aral Sea in Asian Russia has virtually ceased to exist after the rivers feeding it were diverted for irrigation. Consumers stood in line for basic necessities while priority was given to building heavy machin-

“...ecosocialism isn't just about adding ecological demands to our existing Marxist programmes. It's about a method of organisation which is sustainable on the human level for revolutionary cadre

ery, space vehicles and nuclear weapons. And countries in the Soviet orbit – such as East Germany – became notorious for their greyness and dirtiness, due to burning cheaper “brown coal” (lignite) or using shoddy concrete.

No wonder that in the late 1980s, the workers didn't lift a finger to defend these so-called “workers' states”. Their actual, human needs were never a prior-

ity for their bureaucratic rulers.

Against productivism

So ecosocialism is opposed not only to free-market capitalism, but to productivism in all its forms – the push for economic growth, whether measured in profits or in raw production numbers, at all costs. Productivism is the triumph of the abstract (numbers of currency or objects) over the concrete (the real quality of life of the masses). Ecosocialism believes that socialism must run on a triple bottom line – not only must a new society restore political and economic power to the workers, but it must also work to heal social alienation and the alienation of humanity from the rest of nature.

So why is ecosocialism becoming so vital at this point in history? It's well known that “Marx is back” since the near-collapse of financial capitalism in 2008 and the subsequent “recovery for the rich only”, which have laid bare the continuous reality of class warfare and exploitation. But the massive economic

Eco-socialism

crisis only one of the problems facing the current world system.

PERIL syndrome

New Zealand socialist Peter de Waal came up with the concept of the “PERIL syndrome”. PERIL here stands for five integrated crises that capitalism faces at the current time. The **Profitability** crisis is only the first: there is also:

- an **Ecological** crisis involving global warming, polar melting and other such imminent fundamental changes to the environment;
- a **Resources** crisis as fossil fuels get rare, and battles loom over other scarce resources, such as rare-earth minerals in the Congo;
- a crisis of **Imperialism** as the United States and its allies such as Israel increasingly find it difficult to exert their hegemony over such up-and-coming economies as the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa);
- a **Legitimacy** crisis as the veil is increasingly stripped away from the naked greed of the ruling classes, as the working classes in the rich countries are progressively stripped of their social gains, while the working classes in developing countries become aware of their potential collective power.

This combination of crises suggests that the global capitalist order is now fragile in a way it has not been since the Second World War. Some theorists – like the New Zealand socialist Grant Morjan or the Russian-American Dmitry Orlov – have gone as far as to argue that global capitalism is doomed to collapse within a few decades.

However, ecosocialism doesn't necessarily hold to this apocalyptic scenario. Whether globalised capitalism is sustainable – and what social order or orders might replace it – is a question which has an objective as well as a subjective factor. The crises mean that the

global order must change and compensate – but the balance of class forces will determine exactly how that comes about.

Socialist organisation for human beings

So how shall ecosocialists organise? The first point to answer is that the last thing that ecosocialists in New Zealand want is another “sect”. In the Communist Manifesto, Marx and Engels said that communists do not form another party opposed to working-class parties. Similarly, ecosocialists have not been forming groups opposed to other socialist groups.

Some existing socialist parties – such as the Left Party in France or the Socialist Alliance in Australia – have explicitly declared themselves “ecosocialists”. But in the rest of the world, ecosocialists are forming networks for discussion and common action, while still working within the existing left, socialist and green parties. The concrete form this take depends on the circumstances. For instance, the Green Left in England continues to work within the Green Party, whereas ecosocialists in New Zealand have largely abandoned our own Greens, especially since Sue Bradford was defeated within that party.

But the crucial distinction is that ecosocialism – being based on the concept of ending the alienation of the whole human being, not just from the means of production – is careful to not perpetuate that alienation within its own structures. The “sect” model of organisation which has been standard on the small-group radical left in the developed countries has become a dead end. A holistic view of politics, such as that which ecosocialism provides, argues that no organisation can shut itself off from capitalist society and claim to be proof against its abuses.

We must increasingly admit that the actually-existing radical left is not an affirming and nurturing place for work-

ers, in particular queer, non-white and female workers. We are all familiar with recent scandals – here and overseas – with sexually abusive behaviour in radical organisations. This happens in organisations which have sucked in the productivist logic of capitalism – where comrades are “burned for fuel” to fulfil the schemes of a self-perpetuating leadership.

Therefore, ecosocialism isn't just about adding ecological demands to our existing Marxist programmes. It's about a method of organisation which is sustainable on the human level for revolutionary cadre – which neither burns them out or turns them into automata carrying out leadership commands. This is perhaps the main reason why I think it is good for ecosocialists not to separate themselves from other radical parties – that not only does ecosocialist politics complement rather than challenge socialism-from-below, but ecosocialist organisational principles can save many good activists from being burned out and alienated by small-group leaders gone berserk.

Where to from here?

The Green Party in New Zealand has completely abased itself before the profit motive. It is now the party of “green-washing”, of middle-class consumer activism, of the relatively well-off under capitalism seeking some kind of moral basis for their consumption habits. The voting numbers for the Greens in South Auckland show how relevant this is to the working class.

Socialists must challenge Green politics from the left, showing how ecological issues are of top relevance to the quality of life of working people. But we must also challenge bureaucratic and schematic politics from a holistic viewpoint – “green is the tree of life”, said Lenin quoting Goethe, and socialism which exploits activists and crushes their spirits is nothing worthy of the name.

Auckland: Better housing for workers needed

by Daphne Lawless

Preliminary feedback has just closed on the Auckland Council's Draft Unitary Plan, a document which will have major impact on how working people in the Super City live, work and play.

When the single Auckland Council replaced Auckland's four cities, three districts and regional council in 2010, the law stated that a new Unitary Plan be drawn up to replace all the local planning documents – covering issues such as transport, housing, and infrastructure.

There has been big debate in the Auckland media on the issue – mostly on the question of “intensification” of housing.

Mayor Len Brown's Labour-backed administration is supporting a halt to Auckland's suburban sprawl along the motorways north and south. Instead, many more people will live in apartments, terraced houses, and other small dwellings.

Right-wing politicians and “residents' associations” from the leafy suburbs such as St Heliers and Milford are up in arms about these proposals. They've been yelling about the danger of “slums”, about how higher-density living is “not the Kiwi way”, and refusing to let “their suburbs” change.

To some degree, these are the same people who have always run Auckland. The conservative leaders in Auckland supported sprawl along the new motorway systems starting in the 1950s.

Existing working class and Pasifika communities in the inner suburbs of the city – Ponsonby, Newton and Freemans Bay – had their homes destroyed for the new motorways. They were encouraged into houses in suburbs far from the city, such as Mangere and Otara.

Auckland thus developed a form of socio-economic apartheid. The old central



Auckland Mayor Len Brown and Local Government Minister Nick Smith. Any new housing needs to be both quality housing and affordable housing.

“ 30% of the new high-density housing should be made available for rent or sale to working families at affordable prices.

villas in which working people had lived for decades were taken over and done up by the upwordly mobile class.

Right-wing politicians want Auckland to expand “outwards, not upwards” – new suburbs on greenfield sites. These will be dependent on cars, clogging Auckland's roads even further. They will also mean that working people will continue to be housed far away from the leafy suburbs – keeping their beloved property prices high.

The right-wing argument that sprawl makes housing affordable is only true if we all need 4-bedroom stand-alone houses on big sections. But increasing numbers of working people have small families or no children, and don't need that kind of space.

Well-designed apartments and terraced

houses in the central suburbs of Auckland could not only bring housing prices down significantly. By hooking into existing public transport – as well as the proposed City Rail Link – they could remove the need to own one or more cars, an expense which makes a big dent in workers' budgets.

However, Len Brown's plans are far from perfect. If workers's needs aren't taken seriously, these new apartments might be put out of workers' reach and bought up by the same kind of middle-class professionals who now dominate Ponsonby and Grey Lynn.

John Minto's campaign for Mayor of Auckland on behalf of the MANA movement should take this up. We shouldn't listen to the voices who support “traditional” suburban sprawl, dependent on cars. But we have to demand that perhaps 30% of the new high-density housing should be made available for rent or sale to working families at affordable prices.

Health and safety

Health and Safety system: "Not fit for purpose"



The prioritisation of profit over the wellbeing of workers is the basis of the disaster at Pike River as are the repeated deaths in the forestry industry.

by Byron Clark, Christchurch Fightback member.

"Not fit for purpose." That was the verdict on New Zealand's health and safety system that the Independent Taskforce on Workplace Health and Safety delivered to Labour Minister Simon Bridges at the end of April. The taskforce discovered a number of "significant weaknesses" in laws, rules and regulations which were behind the country's poor record of deaths and injuries at work.

New Zealand has an accident rate about 20-25% higher than Australia or the UK. Among the recommendations of the taskforce are creating a new, stand-alone, well-resourced health and safety agency and enacting a new health and safety act to overhaul the one enacted in 1993, as well as changes to many other related laws.

The report mentions "poor worker engagement" on health and safety issues and advocates better worker-partici-

pation and greater protection for those who raise concerns about issues in their workplaces. This is at odds with legislation such as the 90-day trial period and other recent reforms which have given workers less protection. The taskforce itself hardly set an example for worker representation either- just one of its six members came from the labour movement, the other five from business.

The majority of workplace injuries occur in just five industries - manufacturing, construction, agriculture, forestry and fishing. Mining was also highlighted by the taskforce, with Chairman Rob Jager noting the explosion at the Pike River mine, which resulted in the deaths of twenty nine people, as an example of a "significant failure" in New Zealand's health and safety regime.

Certain groups are more likely to be injured in the workplace than others. As might be expected, youth and workers with low literacy and numeracy skills are disproportionately at risk, as are Maori and Pacific Islanders, who often fall in

the previous categories due to a young population and comparatively worse educational outcomes than Pakeha.

If the proposed changes are legislated, workers will likely come out better off, with an estimated twenty-five per cent reduction in workplace injuries. However, legislation will not necessarily be followed in every workplace, and the ones that don't comply are likely to be the deunionised firms and industries that employ the marginalised workers who are currently most likely to be injured on the job.

The best protections for workers of course will not be top-down from government but bottom up from organised workers on the 'shop floor'. Health and safety remains one of the few areas workers can legally strike over outside a contract negotiation. Ultimately of course, the wellbeing of working people needs to be prioritised higher than profit.